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SEXUAL DOUBLES AND SEXUAL MASQUERADES:
THE STRUCTURES OF SEX SYMBOLS

The University Lecture in Religion
at
Arizona State University

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SEXUAL DOUBLES AND SEXUAL MASQUERADES: THE STRUCTURES OF SEX SYMBOLS

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I. The Divine Double

The story of a woman who secretly or magically replaces another woman in a man's bed takes on many different forms in different folk literatures. Men, too, double and masquerade in sexual situations. I wish to demonstrate the origins of this theme in ancient Indian literature and to show how the theme takes on different meanings as it moves back and forth between supernatural stories dealing with goddesses (or fairytales dealing with women who have magic powers) and realistic stories dealing with ordinary human women. I will deal primarily with the supernatural versions, assuming that my readers will view them against the background of the realistic Western variants that they know, from the Hebrew Bible,¹ Boccaccio,² medieval courtly romances,³ Shakespeare,⁴ and operas.⁵ But I will concentrate on the human, psychological meanings of these stories, rather than the theological.

Moreover, though I will confine myself primarily to the data supplied by ancient India, to demonstrate the ways in which Hindus have expressed their own particular ideas about double women and men—and various Hindus at different times and places have expressed rather

different ideas about this—I wish both to contrast those ideas with our own and to suggest ways in which we share with Hindus—and perhaps, though by no means necessarily, with other cultures—certain underlying assumptions about the sexual doubling of men and women.

A Brāhmaṇa text from c. 900 B.C. tells the earliest narrative version I know of the story of a human woman who uses magical powers (belonging to her husband) to produce a sexual surrogate:

Yavakri had the glory and glamor of a Brahmin; if he called a woman to him and said, "Hey!" to her, she made love with him and she died; and even if she did not make love with him, she died. He called the wife of a certain Brahmin to him and said "Hey!" to her. She reflected, "If I make love with him, or if I do not, I will surely die in any case. Hell, let me make love with him; if I am to die, let me at least die giving pleasure to a Brahmin." She said to him, "Stay there, and I will come to you."

She told her husband what had happened. He made an oblation and created a nymph of the same form (as his wife), and he said to her, "There is Yavakri. Go to him." Then he made a second oblation and created a jealous ogre

and he said to him, "Your wife has just gone to Yavakri. Go to him."

As the nymph came to Yavakri, she stretched out her foot and said, "Man, you have surely never 'cooked' a woman with feet like this." For the bottoms of her feet were covered with hair. The two of them went together, and when they finally pulled apart, just at that moment the ogre came to them. Yavakri died, beheaded; the ogre killed him.⁶

In this story, the good Brahmin wife remains chaste and is split apart from the non-human woman (whose supernatural nature is betrayed by the hair on the soles of her feet); she allows the evil Brahmin to seduce her in order that he may be killed. The good Brahmin himself, too, produces an alter-ego to do his dirty work.

In this myth, the woman produces an identical double of herself in order to avoid the bed of a man that she does not want to sleep with. In other myths, as we will see, a woman may "double as" (i.e., masquerade as) another woman in order to sleep with a man who wishes to sleep with that other woman. The theme may be applied to men, too: a man masquerades as another man in order to sleep with a woman who does not want to sleep with him, or he produces a double of himself in order to avoid the bed of a woman that he does not want to sleep with. The two most common variants are those in which the woman doubles herself or the man masquerades as another man. Though the initial premise is the same in both of these variants—a man wishes to sleep with a woman against her will—, when *she* produces the double she avoids the encounter (because she outnumbers him two to one), while when *he* produces the double she is tricked into the encounter (because he outnumbers her two to one).

II. The Divine Masquerade

A complex myth that combines several different themes of sexual surrogates and split women occurs in a medieval Sanskrit text that tells the tale of the Goddess who splits into her two aspects of Gaurī ("the Fair") and Kālī ("the Dark"):

One day the god Śiva teased his wife, the Goddess, about her dark skin. Insulted and angry, she went away to devote herself to asceticism in order to obtain a fair, golden skin. Her little son begged to come with her, saying, "Do not abandon me; for a son is a vessel to receive his father's cruelty in the absence of his mother." But she left her son to guard the door in order to prevent other women from entering the bedroom of her husband, for she suspected Śiva of womanizing. While she was gone, a demon named Āḍi took advantage of her absence to attempt to kill Śiva. He took the form of a serpent to slip past the guard into Śiva's bedroom, and then he took the form of Śiva's beautiful wife. But he placed teeth as hard as thunderbolts, with sharp tips, inside the vagina of the form that he assumed, in order to kill Śiva. As they began to make love, Śiva suspected that this was not his wife; he looked carefully and missed a certain twist of her hair. Then he placed a sharp weapon upon his own penis and satisfied the demon's desire. The demon screamed horribly and died.

When the Goddess heard that Śiva had been seduced by another woman, as she thought, she became furious; she cursed her son to become an impotent stone, for having failed to fulfill his charge as guardian. Her anger came out of her body in the form of a lion, with a huge tongue lolling out of his mouth that was full of sharp teeth.

Then the god Brahmā came to her and granted her her wish that she might have a golden body and become half of Śiva's body, in the form of the androgyne. She sloughed off from her

body a dark woman, who went away to live in the mountains. The Goddess, now in her golden skin, set an end to the curse that she had unjustly given to her son; she returned to Śiva, who made love to her.⁷

There are several different sorts of sexual masquerade in this story. The original goddess is integrated; she has a black outer sheath and a golden nature. This condition is intolerable, however, and she splits in two, one half becoming the destructive and unmarried Kālī, "the Black," the other half the benevolent and married Gaurī, "the Golden Girl." The dark goddess is rejected by Śiva; she leaves and sends back, eventually, a more acceptable form of herself, the golden goddess; she masquerades as another aspect of herself, discarding her dark shadow and creating, in its place, a bright shadow of herself in order to win her husband back. This is her solution to the problem of his infidelity (a cause for the masquerade in many other variants of this theme).

The chopped off, negative Kālī (the one who cursed her son to become impotent) is banished to the liminal area of the Vindhya mountains, beyond the Hindu pale, together with the lion whose mouth recapitulates the vagina dentata. The remaining golden form (the one who freed her son from the curse) becomes one half of a more acceptable integration: she takes the part of the female half of the androgyne. But the plot thickens when someone else creates an identical image of her to send to Śiva's bed in her place. The myth then begins to fragment into multiple surrogates and substitutes.

The demon Āḍi is, like the goddess Gaurī, androgynous; he is serially androgynous, while she becomes vertically androgynous when she occupies the left side of Śiva's body—split once again.⁸ The contrast between the demon's

false, beautiful outer form and his true, devastating internal form, the vagina dentata, is the inverse of the contrast in the Goddess herself, who sheds her black outer sheath to reveal her golden inner form.

A fascinating transformation of the myth of Gaurī and Kālī was told recently in Orissa:

The gods had given a curse that the only way that the buffalo demon would die was when he saw the sexual organ of a woman. Durgā, when she started her fight with the buffalo demon, did not know this. While fighting, Durgā in her anger produced other goddesses. These were Mangalā, Hinguḷā, and Si-taḷā. Goddess Mangalā whispered in Durgā's ear what the curse of the gods was. Durgā in anger took off her robes and placed each of her feet on two distant hills. The buffalo was under her, between her legs, looking up at her vagina, and at that moment Durgā kills him by piercing him with her trident. Then Durgā was extremely angry with the gods for having given such a curse to humiliate her. Her anger grew so terrible that she transformed herself, grew smaller and black and left her lion mount and started walking on foot. Her name then became Kālī. With tongue lolling out and dripping with blood, she then went on a blind destructive rampage, killing everything and everyone in sight, regardless of who they were. The gods and the people became extremely worried and appealed to Śiva for help. Mahadev [Śiva] agreed and lay himself down, sleeping, on the path on which the furious, black and naked Kālī was coming. In her blinded anger she did not see him and stepped on his chest. At that moment Śiva's *linga* [penis] became erect and entered Kālī. At that instant Kālī recognized her husband and pulled out her tongue in ecstasy [the iconography at the time of Kālī *pūjā* represents that instant] and her anger disappears.⁹

Building upon the classical theme of the

erotic death of the buffalo demon, who simultaneously marries Durgā and dies at her hands,¹⁰ this Orissan myth transfers to the buffalo demon—and to Durgā—parts of the roles played by Āḍi and Śiva in the more obscure Sanskrit text. Here *Durgā herself* has the deadly vagina that the Sanskrit text gives to the demon Āḍi (and to the lion), and it is she, not Śiva, that kills the demon. In both versions, it is Śiva who has the razor phallus, the *penis aculeatus* that subdues his dangerous sexual partner; here, since that partner is his wife rather than a demon, he does not kill her, but merely diffuses her anger. Where in the Sanskrit text Kālī's splitting into two goddesses (and a lion) had no direct connection with the sexual encounter between Śiva and Āḍi, here she loses her lion, takes on the protruding tongue that had been the lion's, becomes black, and splits as a direct result of her own sexual encounter with the buffalo. And it is her resulting dark form, not the golden form, that then threatens Śiva sexually. In this way the single encounter with Āḍi in the Sanskrit text is split into two in the Orissan text: Kālī's encounter with Śiva, in which he has the sexual weapon and overcomes her, mirrors her encounter with the demon, in which she has the sexual weapon and overcomes him. Thus the Orissan variant makes explicit some of the parallels implicit in the Sanskrit text: just as Kālī and Āḍi are the evil shadows of Gaurī, so the buffalo demon is the evil shadow of Śiva.

Some of these stories tell simultaneously of doubles created in order to avoid sexual encounters and of masquerades created in order to facilitate sexual encounters. Thus the god Śiva manages to commit adultery with his own wife, sometimes when he is disguised as an Untouchable man and sometimes when she is disguised as an Untouchable woman.¹¹ The most com-

plex example that I know of the man who commits adultery with his own wife occurs in the *Yogavāsistha*, a Sanskrit text composed in Kashmir around the 10th century A.D. This story is based upon a familiar theme of sexual masquerade: the tale of a man who disguises himself as a woman (or magically transforms himself into a woman) in order to get into the harem to make love to his princess.¹² It is here combined with other familiar themes: the queen who persuades her renunciant husband to return to his royal duties,¹³ the serial androgyne—queen for a day, king for a day—,¹⁴ and the creature (like the vampire or werewolf) who takes one form under the sun and another under the moon:

Queen Cūḍālā and her husband, King Śikhidhvaja, were passionately in love. In time, Cūḍālā became enlightened and acquired magic powers, including the ability to fly, but she concealed these powers from her husband, and when she attempted to instruct him, he spurned her as a foolish and presumptuous woman. Yet he remarked that she seemed to have regained the bloom of her youth, and he assured her that he would continue to make love to her. Eventually, Śikhidhvaja himself decided to seek his own enlightenment and withdrew to the forest to meditate; he renounced his throne and refused to let Cūḍālā accompany him, but left her to govern the kingdom.

After eighteen years, she decided to visit him; she took the form of a young Brahmin boy named Kumbha and was welcomed by Śikhidhvaja, who did not recognize her but remarked that Kumbha looked very much like his queen, Cūḍālā. Cūḍālā told Śikhidhvaja that "he" was named Kumbha because he had been born when his father, the sage Nārada, had become excited by the sight of a group of divine nymphs sporting in the water while he was bathing, and shed his semen into a pot (*kumbha*). After a while, Śikhidhvaja became

very fond of Kumbha, who instructed him and enlightened him; and Cūḍālā began to be aroused by her handsome husband, thinking, "Here is my own, handsome husband, in this beautiful forest. We are in a state in which fatigue is unknown; is it any wonder that desire for pleasure has arisen in my heart? A woman whose passion is not aroused when she is close to her strong husband is no woman at all; she is as good as dead."

And so she (still in the form of the Brahmin boy) went away for a while. When she returned, she told Śikhidhvaja that she had encountered the hot-tempered sage Durvāsas hurrying through the sky and had remarked that he looked like a woman hastening to an illicit rendezvous with her lover. "When the sage heard this," said Kumbha, "he cursed me to become a woman, with breasts and long hair, every night." That night, before Śikhidhvaja's eyes, Kumbha changed into a woman named Madanikā; he/she cried out in a stammering voice, "I feel as if I am falling, trembling, melting; I am so ashamed as I see myself becoming a woman. Alas, my chest is sprouting breasts, and jewelry is growing right out of my body."

As Madanikā, every night she slept beside the king in the same bed like a virgin, while as Kumbha she lived with him during the day as a friend. After a few days she said to him, "King, I sleep beside you every night as a woman. I want to behave like a woman and get good at it. I want to marry you and to enjoy the happiness of a woman. Since we are both immune to desire, there can be no harm in this." He consented to this, and so one day in the form of Kumbha Cūḍālā bathed ceremonially with Śikhidhvaja, and that night, in the form of Madanikā, she married him. And so the couple, whose previous state of marriage was concealed, were joined together. They lay down on the marriage bed of flowers and made love all night.

Thus they lived as dear friends during the day and as husband and wife at night. After they had lived happily in this way for a while, Cūḍālā decided to test the king's detachment. She used her magic powers to create the illusion of a garden with a beautiful bed, and on that bed lay Madanikā making love passionately with a young man handsomer than Śikhidhvaja. Śikhidhvaja saw them and turned away, but was unmoved; "Please continue; do not let me interrupt your pleasure," he said to the flushed and apologetic Madanikā; "Kumbha and I are great friends, free from all passion; but you, Madanikā, are nothing but a girl created by a sage's curse." Madanikā said, "Women are fickle by nature; they have eight times as much lust as men. Please don't be angry with me." "I have no anger, my dear girl," said Śikhidhvaja; "but—only because good people would disapprove—I do not want you to be my wife. Let us be good friends, as we were before, without any passion."

Cūḍālā was delighted with the king's immunity to lust and anger, and she changed immediately from Madanikā to Cūḍālā. Śikhidhvaja said, "Who are you and how did you get here? In your body, your movements, your smile, your manner, your grace—you look so much like my wife." "Yes, I am, truly, Cūḍālā," she said, and then she told him all that she had done. He embraced her passionately, and said, "You are the most wonderful wife who ever lived. The wife is everything to her husband: friend, brother, sympathizer, servant, guru, companion, wealth, happiness, scripture, abode, and slave. Come, embrace me again." Then he made love to her all night and returned with her to resume his duties as king. He ruled for ten thousand years and finally attained release.¹⁵

The dualisms in this Vedantic text are somewhat different from those of more traditional Indian texts. Cūḍālā and Śikhidhvaja are said to be passionately

in love, like two souls in one body; it is he who splits the souls apart when he goes away, renouncing her. Cūḍālā wishes to be both her husband's concubine and his teacher; at the start she plays the first role but is then denied it; and he refuses to grant her the second role. In order to reunite them, she engages in a series of splittings, a series of schizophrenic disguises. First she becomes entirely one-sided, entirely male, a boy who does not even have a mother, having been born from a pot (like many Indian sages¹⁶). Perhaps she does this because she suspects that on some level the king's need for asceticism is in part a revulsion against her as a woman, an erotic woman.

But the queen wants to get him into bed as well as to enlighten him; the story is, after all, not merely a parable of enlightenment but a very human, very funny story. Eventually she manages to enjoy him as a male friend by day and as a lover and wife by night. This double deception works well enough, and may in fact express Cūḍālā's full fantasy: to be Śikhidhvaja's intellectual superior under the sun, and his erotic partner by moonlight.

But Cūḍālā still wants to merge the two roles, and to play them both herself, in her true persona. To do this, and to test him, she first creates two more magical doubles: a double of the already double woman Madanikā, and a double of Śikhidhvaja, her lover. The illusion of the adultery of Madanikā mirrors the lie of the adulterous rendezvous of the sage Durvāsas. Śikhidhvaja passes the test, not because he is so far above jealousy as to allow his wife to sleep with another man, but because he realizes that the woman is not only not his true wife, but not even a true woman. As a result of his vision of the adultery, Śikhidhvaja comes to realize the purely illusory nature of the "true" Madanikā and rejects

her—for being illusory or for being promiscuous? We do not know.

The playful juggling of the sexes demonstrates both the unreality of appearances and the falsity of the belief that one sex is better than the other. When Śikhidhvaja rejects Madanikā, Cūḍālā is forced to reveal herself and to tell him the truth. He is overcome with gratitude and with delight that it was his wife, of all people, who was his guru—a situation that he found intolerable at the beginning of the story. The wife is everything to him, integrating not only mother and whore, but guru and slave, and many other human relationships.

The story of Cūḍālā and Śikhidhvaja imagines the intimacy that takes place in the daytime, when the woman, by becoming a man, experiences the friendship that men have with one another in their daytime associations; the sexual intimacy of night is a different intimacy, though still complementary rather than contradictory to the intellectual intimacy of the day. Both of these are maintained when the woman reintegrates herself, abandoning her masquerade. But this is hardly a typical Indian solution, for it happens only in an India where a king can rule for ten thousand years. Indeed, the relationship between Cūḍālā and Śikhidhvaja is never the relationship of a real husband and wife. She functions like a goddess, giving him her grace and leading him up the garden path of enlightenment, setting up a divine illusion and then revealing herself to him as the gods reveal themselves. She flies, and masterminds the whole story. This is a story about a goddess, after all, not a story about a woman.

III. Double Men: the Brahmin Begetter

Men, as well as women, tend to split in this way. The god Indra from time to time assumes the form of a particular

widow was legitimized and institutionalized in the custom of levirate marriage. In the first episode of the myth of Dīrghatamas, a brother misuses this privilege, attempting to rape a woman who resists him and whose husband is in any case still very much alive. Though the would-be rapist is criticized by the text, it is the child, not the uncle, who is cursed to be blind—perhaps in punishment for the sexual sin implicit in his Oedipal objection to his mother's sexual activity.

Levirate marriages fell into desuetude and disrepute in later Hinduism (perhaps because of abuses of this sort) and were replaced by the widespread custom of inviting a Brahmin to impregnate a woman whose husband was, for one reason or another, unable to do this. This custom is described in the second episode of the Dīrghatamas myth (Dīrghatamas's begetting of Kakṣivat) as well as in the episode which prompts the retelling of that myth: Vyāsa's impregnation of the mothers of the fathers of the Epic heroes. But in this story the Brahmin surrogate, however trustworthy, is repulsive, and so the folk theme of the maid sent in disguise is attracted to the myth. The final solution in this steadily escalating hierarchy of male surrogates is the invocation of the gods—traditional fathers of so many special sons of virgin mothers. Only on this highest, mythical level is the substitute satisfactory to the woman, freeing her at last from having to supply her own female surrogates to accommodate the unsatisfactory male surrogates provided for her bed.

IV. Structures and Symbols

Since the mythology of sexual doubling deals with men as well as women, we can argue that it is concerned with an ambivalent attitude to sexuality in general rather than to women in particular. The plot of the narratives seems to

have fascinated people of many cultures; variants of all four forms of our theme occur widely in world folklore.²⁵ Some very basic meanings attach themselves to the basic structure in all variants of the myth, while other meanings attach themselves to many variants, and still others serve rather to show how very differently two retellings of the myth will see the point of the myth.

The one clear constant in all the myths of doubling is, *tout court*, doubling—more precisely, doubling in situations of pairing. That is, one thing that all the myths are about is the tension between the desire to remain whole and the desire (or necessity) to split into two.²⁶ The dyad of "integrated" and "split" is itself a basic contrasting unit in mythology; that is, any split image may be used to form one half of a pair, the other half being the integrated image of which it is the dissection; the decision to split something in half is in itself a question that may be answered by yes or no. (Indo-Europeans have usually answered "Yes" to this question.) On this level, the structure *is* the meaning; the medium is the message. Right and left, good and evil, life and death—these are inevitable dichotomies produced by the brain that has two lobes and controls two eyes, two hands. We are split creatures literally by nature, and we process all the data that we are given in the same manner that a simple digital machine would process it: every question is broken down and reformulated so that there are only two possible answers to it, yes or no. Common sense is binary; the simplest and most efficient way to process data seems to be to begin by dividing it in half, and then to divide the halves in half . . .

But the myth does not settle for these elementary structures; it modifies them, qualifies them, and often rejects them

in many different ways. Even within India, as we have seen, the meanings that are given to those structures differ dramatically. The signifiers translate from Sanskrit into English, but what is signified may be very different indeed. There are double women, split women, in all of these myths, but they are not the same doubles: sometimes they are mother and whore, sometimes wife and virgin, sometimes wife and guru, sometimes wife and co-wife, sometimes lover and sister. Can we generalize about the human meanings that flesh out the abstract armatures in all of these myths? We cannot, I think, make many statements of this sort that will apply to *all* the myths, but we can isolate several patterns that do seem to occur in many of them and that may represent several alternative views of human sexuality.

Certain human implications are built into the dualistic structures and expressed as paradoxes. Often, when one person splits into two, one of the halves experiences the event and the other does not; one of them is "there," and the other is not. Thus, the meaning of the splitting as perceived by the person who is split is not merely "I am one, but I am also two," but, "This is happening to me and this is not happening to me," and, "I am here and I am not here." The fact that one double is said to be "real" at the beginning, while the other is either a masquerade or a magical duplication, also leads to a contrast between reality and appearance that is a constant in these myths. But, again, what is real and what is apparent differs from one variant to another; and something that is unreal in origin may come to have very real effects.

The basic split is between the self and the double of the self, the "I" and the "non-I" or "the other I." To this is then added the secondary double of the partner in the sexual act at any single mo-

ment: "I" and "the other person." In most of the texts that I know, from monogamous Indo-European cultures, this sexual other is one person who may be doubled or masqueraded into two persons. The mythologies of polygamous societies would share the first two levels (the self/other self and self/partner), but after that one could probably expect a very different pattern.

These dualisms of signifiers—whatever they signify—may often be mediated, as Claude Lévi-Strauss maintains, by a third signifier.²⁷ The very nature of the Hegelian dialectic that underlies the structuralist model tells us that any cognitive dualisms will be easily combined with triads, for every pair implies a mediating third; there are no happy couples, merely eternal triangles (or *ménages à trois*). Thus the main protagonists, the man and the woman, may be mediated by an integrated figure or by a child.

The one non-structural dichotomy that seems to characterize almost all the myths of sexual masquerade is the social dichotomy between the woman who is permitted, one's own (called, in the Sanskrit tradition, *svakīyā*) and the woman who is not permitted, not one's own (called *parakīyā*, "the other's woman"). This dichotomy is not natural but cultural; it has to do with law, not with biology. In most, though not all, variants, the permitted woman is married and maternal, while the forbidden woman is erotic and not the hero's wife (though she may be someone else's wife)—the adulterous woman, *Madanikā* or the *Gopīs*. The permitted woman is incomplete in some way, sometimes because she is nothing but a mother, sometimes because she is *not* able to bear children. The other's woman is seen as more complete, epitomized by the highly accomplished courtesan; unlike the permitted woman,

the other woman gives the hero far more than her mere body; she engages him fully, erotically in the broadest sense of the term. Often the other woman is unattainable, in contrast with the wife one *has*. This aspect of the narrative is straightforward enough: one fantasizes not about what one can have, but about what one cannot have.

The variants in which a woman creates a double in order *not to be* in the bed of a man who would force her to be there, and those in which a woman masquerades in order *to be* in the bed of a man who would not want her to be there, may be seen as two aspects of the same myth: the woman wants not to be with one man and to be with another man. She wishes to disappear secretly from one bed in order to appear secretly in another. The two aspects collapse together when the wife wishes to masquerade as her husband's mistress (or the mistress as the wife); she wants to be with one man, but to be a *different woman* to that man.

The universal sexual impulse engenders a major tension when it comes into conflict with the particular exigencies of human society, when nature meets culture. The result may be a major human contradiction: two human truths that are simultaneously true and mutually opposed. In such a situation, as Claude Lévi-Strauss has taught us, the myth arises as a mediating factor between nature and culture. In the myth, the conflict turns into a narrative that expresses a contradiction that can never be resolved.²⁸ The splitting that seems to solve the original problem of conflict or ambivalence becomes in itself a source of new anxiety; and the new integration that arises in response to that anxiety produces new tensions.

We might expect these tensions to be approached differently by different cultures. Hinduism, where the myth of the sexual double is particularly rampant, is

a religion which imposes a razor-sharp edge between the image of the permitted woman and the image of the forbidden woman.²⁹ Orthodox Hinduism values the permitted woman and abhors the forbidden woman; but later, devotional Hinduism challenges this model by exalting extra-marital love as the only true expression of the love of god: the dangers and separations that are a part of the illegal liaison are analogous to the sufferings of the soul in longing for god. This is true of both the *bhakti* movement (as expressed in the adulterous love of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā) and the Tantric movement (as expressed in the ritual of intercourse with an Untouchable woman.)³⁰ It is surely no accident that the courtly tradition of medieval Christianity, which uses adulterous love as a similar religious metaphor, produces sexual doubles much as Hinduism does.³¹ Thus Hindu society itself splits into two, one half (the traditional half) revering the *svakīyā* over the *parakīyā*, while the other half (the romantic or esoteric half) reveres the *parakīyā* over the *svakīyā*.

Tantrism also provides both another sort of sexual doubling and a supreme form of integration: Śiva appears as the corpse (*śava*) that is transformed into the living consort (*śiva*) when he copulates with the Goddess (as in the Orissan myth); and the Tantric yogi copulates with the female principle (the Kuṇḍalinī) inside his own body—that is, he becomes his own sexual partner, the ultimate narcissist.

This composite image of woman is roughly parallel to the image of trousers described by an apocryphal Irishman: "They're singular at the top and plural at the bottom."³² The network of interlacing dichotomies cannot be neatly laid out as a structuralist might wish them to be: goddess/woman, man/woman, permitted/forbidden, maternal/erotic,

good/evil, light/dark and, at base, integrated/split. We are dealing with aspects of sexuality that cannot be sorted out into two neat columns, though they still attract to themselves polarized moral judgements.

V. Sexual Relativity

It is difficult to know whose voice is speaking to us in these myths, the voice of a woman or the voice of a man. For, though the Indian myths are almost always written and recorded by men, there is good evidence within the tradition itself that women were always the source of some, if not indeed, most, of the storytelling; theirs might well have been an oral contribution to the tales that were ultimately written down by men. Yet it is also good to bear in mind the likelihood that women will share the dominant mythology of their culture; they learn and assimilate the images that men have of them, and express those images in their own storytelling, even as men express images of themselves that they have learned from women. Since women were excluded from the Sanskrit tradition that is preserved in the myths recorded in the Epics and Purāṇas, we might hazard the guess that the women's contribution was stronger in the realm of vernacular, oral folklore than in the realm of classical texts, but again it would be difficult to substantiate such a claim—especially since there is no clear demarcation between the vernacular ("little") and the Sanskrit ("great") variants of the story. In any case, if we do grant that these stories are not entirely male creations, we may view the sexual doublings in some of these myths from the standpoint of the man and in others from the standpoint of the woman, even if we cannot prove that a man expressed the former and a woman the latter. And some myths seem to express both viewpoints at once.

In the myths in which a woman masquerades as a different woman with the same man, the woman may want to be both erotic and child-bearing, or both sexual and spiritual, to one man, but he wants to have one woman for each purpose, and so he splits her in his fantasy. The woman may not share this fantasy; she is often split against her will. She sees herself, as indeed we all see ourselves, as multiple in a positive sense, and struggles to function, and to be perceived, as an integrated person. Her fantasy is to remain combined like Gaurī/Kālī at the beginning of the myth or Cūḍālā at the end of her story; it is her husband's intolerance of this condition that forces her to split. The woman's image of herself remains integrated even when doubled: it is two of the *same* woman. On those relatively rare occasions when she masquerades as another woman, it is in order to be the other woman to her *own* husband. By contrast, in the many myths in which a man masquerades as a different man in order to trick a woman into bed (the myths of Indra and Ahalyā), the man's dominant fantasy makes him into two different men so that he can enjoy two different women.³³

In most of the oldest variants of the tale of the shadow woman, the shadow serves to exonerate the woman herself from any possible defilement at the hands of a demonic rapist or unwanted husband. These myths may express the woman's reaction to sexual violence; they may express a kind of personality dissociation in reaction to a rape: "This happened to some other woman, not to me." The image of the split woman in these myths is a female fantasy; she does not want to sleep with the man who will merely give her children (as in the myths of unattractive Levirate surrogates) or who will merely take his pleas-

ure from her in the dark (as in the myths of rape), and so she splits away the part of herself that is being used in this way. Her revulsion against the rapist is also expressed in the fantasy of a violent punishment of the man. So, too, in myths where one man masquerades as another, the woman is exonerated from the defilement by a stranger: "I could not tell them apart."³⁴

If we bear in mind the incidental damage done to the children of these supernaturally divorced pairs, we might do well to consider the myths from the standpoint of the child, the hapless mediator between the two divided (and sub-divided) parents. Here we immediately encounter a major difference in the attitude to the maternal figure. From the standpoint of the husband, the mother (of his children) is the permitted woman, sometimes in contrast with the erotic woman; from the standpoint of the wife, she is simultaneously maternal (to her children) and erotic (to her husband). But from the standpoint of the male child, the combined image of mother and erotic woman is threatening and intolerable; this integrated image is what forces the child to split apart, to fantasize that he has two sets of parents, or that there are two of him.³⁵ Thus, when the woman is not merely erotic and child-bearing but is erotic and maternal to the same man, the man will double himself in order to provide two separate male objects, one for each of the two aspects of the intolerably integrated woman.³⁶

And when, on the other hand, the mother goes away (splits, as it were), the child may be injured. Dīrghatamas and one of the children begotten by Vyāsa are blinded; Pāṇḍu is born "pale" and is cursed to die in the act of intercourse; the son of Gaurī/Kālī becomes impotent. It is significant that most of the injuries suffered by the children are anti-sexual injuries: they are punishments for sexuality, but they are also

handicaps that will preclude any future sexual experience—or, the myth may be saying, any possible exposure to sexual danger. The curse of impotence is indeed a curse of revenge that precludes normal, happy sexual experience; but the wish for infantile non-eroticism (a wish that Freud would not grant) is regarded as a blessing that prevents abnormal sexual experience, sexual tragedy.³⁷

VI. Human Blindness and Divine Invisibility

It is impossible to discern any chronological development in the theme of sexual doubles from the mythical to the realistic, from the sacred to the profane, or the reverse. The process of rationalization, from the supernatural to the natural, operates frequently in this literature, but some examples of the genre present us with a transition in the other direction, from the profane to the sacred: in early texts the heroine is a mortal woman, and in later texts she is a goddess.³⁸ Stories of women become inextricably tangled in the toils of human sexual tragedy and take flight in the illusion provided by myth, the illusion that a woman can transform herself into another woman, or into a man. Thus we might do well to see the human concerns as the logical and psychological base from which the theological versions were derived. For myth is a bridge that spans the gap between human experience and the fantasy that grows out of that experience. Some variants narrow the gap by rendering the fantasy in almost realistic terms; but the gap, however small, remains nevertheless.

Is there really any point in distinguishing the "mythical" variants of the theme from the "realistic" ones? Is it only the supernatural ring of invisibility or merely natural darkness that makes the masquerade possible? Does it happen only in myths, or in life? Is it true everywhere,

4 (in Schelling) "All cows are black."

or only in France, that, *Dans la nuit, tous les chats sont gris*? How could it be possible that someone could sleep with two different women, or two different men, on several occasions and never tell the difference?³⁹

William Butler Yeats raises this question, rhetorically, in his poem, "The Three Bushes." A lady sends her maid to her lover in the dark, and tells herself "Maybe we are all the same/Where no candles are,/And maybe we are all the same/That strip the body bare."⁴⁰ Maybe; but maybe not. The Indian story of the demon Āḍi, despite the supernatural elements of gods and demons and vagina dentata, comes close to the realistic truth when the storyteller drily remarks that, as soon as Śiva began to make love to the demon, he "suspected that this was not his wife;" the texts of the myth mention several intimate "signs"—human signs—by which he recognized her, even though the demonic form was magically perfect. And Śikhidhvaja is troubled first by the resemblance between Kumbha and his wife and then by that between Cūḍālā herself and his memory of Cūḍālā.

One can suggest several reasons why the male objects of the sexual masquerade cannot tell the difference between the two women in bed. Traditional concepts of marriage, or traditional marriage partners, do not value individualism as an element in eroticism as do romantic concepts of love or romantic partners; the official partner seeks not the personality but the persona (or, indeed, the body) of the woman in bed. (This is, of course, all the more true of a sadistic rapist, like Yavakri.) The lover, the unofficial, erotic partner, *does* know the difference; indeed, the female surrogate may be created precisely because the woman in love cannot tolerate the embrace of any man other than the man she loves—the man who knows

the difference. Surrogates work only on the people who are *not* erotically attached, but are merely officially or physically attached, to the woman who creates the surrogate.

The metaphorical blindness of the male toward the inner nature of the "official" woman, often coupled with the temporary blindness of the woman who closes her eyes in her resistance to the "official" man, is then expressed as the literal blindness of the child who results from such a union. The blindness of the woman toward her unwanted husband may also be a realistic reflection of the fact that sleeping customs in India, particularly among poor people, are such that a husband and wife may never ever see one another naked. Indian mythology, beginning in 900 B.C.⁴¹ and continuing into the contemporary period,⁴² regards it as inauspicious for a husband to see his wife naked, or for the wife to see her husband naked. The blindness of the child may also express the fact that, without the visual element, the sexual act of the parents was somehow incomplete, and so the child is incomplete.⁴³

Blindness may also be a punishment for the sexual passion that begins with *looking* at someone. In the Freudian view, the distortion of upward displacement makes blindness a metaphor for castration. (Beheading, too, as we have seen in the tale of Yavakri, functions as a sexual punishment in this way.) For this same reason, blindness is what is wished upon people whom one wishes to make free of all further sexual impulse: where there is no sight, there is no desire.

Blindness is the human aspect of what is expressed on the divine level as invisibility. In fact, the man (or woman) may half suspect and half not suspect that the person who *seems* to be the legitimate partner is an imposter; he or

she pretends to be fooled, in order to legitimize the episode, but enjoys it because of the secret knowledge that it is not the permitted partner. Finally, the man cannot tell his (forbidden) beloved from the (permitted) woman who impersonates her because they are in fact the same person; only the myth preserves the fantasy that accompanies the act, the fantasy that there are two separate women there.⁴⁴

When, each for his or her own reason, the man and the woman close their eyes to an intolerable reality, each sees in the dark the myth that makes the reality tolerable. The woman fantasizes that she is in bed with a god (as Pāṇḍu's wives do) or that she is not there at all (as the woman summoned by Yavakri does); the man fantasizes that he is in bed with a woman who is not his wife—or who is an Untouchable. To this degree, *all* of the tales of the sexual surrogate, even the realistic ones, are mythological in the broadest sense of the term: they imagine what cannot ever be in real life.

The supernatural and the realistic stories are alike in some ways, different in others. They are alike in that they deal with the same sets of human problems, though they express those problems differently according to the idioms of each genre. But they differ in the solutions that they can offer to those problems. The realistic stories often end in tragedy: once the fantasy has been acted out, there is a price to pay: the masquerade is discovered, the woman is punished, the trick does not work, the dream lover vanishes. Tragedy is, in this sense, the myth of the failure of mediation. But the myth may at least imagine the ideal solution, the perfect integration. In expressing the conflict between animal nature and human cultural constructs, myths transcend the paradoxical tension between illicit erotic love and legal marital love, a tension that can never be overcome in real life—except, perhaps, among the gods.

the final element, the finishing touch that brings it to life.

⁴⁴This perception, together with many others throughout this essay, came from David Grene, who read so many versions of it, and responded so often, that the end product seems to me to have been jointly composed, like the ballad of the Three Bushes.

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THE LECTURER

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